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Weathering the Storm: Ben Enwonwu's Biafrascapes and the Crisis in the Nigerian Postcolony

MATTHEW LEZNAR

This article appraises Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu's contribution to postcolonial modernism in Nigeria through an analysis of his artistic responses to the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967–70). It argues that Enwonwu's varied 'Biafrascapes', which include portraits, landscapes and paintings featuring mythopoetic imagery, reflect his struggle to ethically convey the conflict's complex realities and legacies.



In his 2015 book *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu persuasively argues that when the Nigerian state, newly independent from British colonial rule, began to fracture under the pressures of political division and sectarian violence during the 1960s, Nigerian modernists were forced to confront a 'crisis in the postcolony'.¹ This crisis culminated in the secession of the Eastern Region under the banner of the Republic of Biafra in May 1967, and was followed by a war between Nigeria and Biafra that ended in the surrender of Biafra in January 1970. Okeke-Agulu further asserts that in the run-up to this period of conflict, 'postcolonial modernism moved beyond the assertion of artistic autonomy or engagement with formal problems to directly confront the pathologies of newly independent Nigeria'.² His suggestion here is that the damage done to the political unity and nationalist aspirations of the Nigerian postcolony during this time also had serious ramifications for postcolonial modernism. It forced those artists who had striven to develop an artistic idiom capable of expressing Nigeria's fledgling freedom to reimagine their creative projects.

While Okeke-Agulu's analysis is detailed and authoritative, his monograph engages primarily with the artistic trajectories of members of the Zaria Art Society. This was

formed in the late 1950s in the run-up to Nigeria gaining independence from the British in October 1960.³ Notable affiliates of the group are Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya and Demas Nwoko, and the society – also known as the Zaria Rebels – is possibly best known for its articulation of the aesthetic-political concept of ‘natural synthesis’. This was a mode of artistic nationalism designed to mediate between the conflicting influences of colonialism and indigenous traditions. Rejecting the idea that modern African artists should copy European aesthetics, the Zaria Rebels instead sought to synthesise the teachings and styles of both foreign and native cultures to produce a hybrid form of African artistic expression.⁴ Their programme of natural synthesis was particularly significant for the way it laid the groundwork for the adaptation and popularisation of the *uli* art tradition at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka in the aftermath of the Nigeria-Biafra war.⁵ While Okeke-Agulu’s outline of the Zaria Rebels’ synthesising approach demonstrates the efficacy of his approach to postcolonial modernism, it is also crucial to assert that other Nigerian modernists – and Ben Enwonwu most notably – had been forging such a path in the decades before the society came together.

Enwonwu does loom large in his 2008 monograph. However, I would argue that he functions there more as an antagonist to the young and radical Zaria artists than as an important postcolonial modernist in his own right. For instance, Okeke-Agulu asserts that Enwonwu’s public criticism of the supposed fashion for abstraction among younger artists could be seen as ‘part of a high-stakes intergenerational struggle for the direction of Nigerian art’, one that showed Enwonwu resisting ‘the emergence of a new artistic context and sensibility’.⁶ While this may have been the case, the fact that Enwonwu was also deeply concerned with interrogating the state of the nation and the arts in the post-independence period suggests that his practice was likewise affected by this time of political transition. It is my contention that the diverse body of work that he went on to produce in response to the Nigeria-Biafra war and crisis – works that I refer to as his Biafrascapes – indicates that he deserves to be considered a vanguard figure in postcolonial modernist expression.

It is this article’s contention that Enwonwu’s creative reaction to the Biafran crisis offers a useful but often overlooked prism through which we can reassess how Nigerian modernists were affected by the transition from colony to postcolony. By referring to Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie and Nkiru Nzegwu’s histories of Enwonwu’s life and utilising anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s theory of scapes, I will argue that approaching Enwonwu’s multimodal responses to the war as a collection of Biafrascapes helps to construct a more nuanced account of his struggle to weather the storm that erupted over the Nigerian postcolony in the late 1960s. Indeed, by offering close readings of several

works produced by the artist during and after the war, I will assert that these Biafrascapes not only interrogate the conflict's implications for Nigerian modernist art, but that Enwonwu's reaction to the crisis also gestures to its broader socio-political, humanitarian and global ramifications. Furthermore, while the Nigeria-Biafra war does not feature prominently in Enwonwu's art in the 1980s and early 1990s, I will suggest that his efforts to imaginatively mediate the conflict during the late 1960s and early 1970s laid the groundwork for the dancing, mythopoetic forms that would define his later work.

SITUATING ENWONWU INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF BIAFRA

Sylvester Ogbechie provides an authoritative account of Enwonwu's life and career in his 2008 monograph *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist*. Enwonwu hailed from the thriving market town of Onitsha in the western area of Igboland, and his home was part of the secessionist Biafran territory. Yet even before Biafra's breakaway in 1967, Enwonwu was forced to react to the worsening political situation in Nigeria. A military coup took place on 15 January 1966, resulting in the deaths of prominent political figures including Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the prime minister of Nigeria, and Ahmadu Bello, the premier of the then Northern Region of Nigeria. As a number of the coup plotters were Igbo, a perception grew outside of the Eastern Region that the Igbo population were attempting to seize power. Violent massacres began to be perpetrated against Igbo people and others from the Eastern Region of Nigeria, and as a result Enwonwu was compelled to move much of his art from his Lagos studio to his home in Onitsha in the spring of 1966.⁷ The prejudice and violence against the Igbo people became a major factor in the decision taken by the Eastern Region's leadership, headed by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, to declare unilateral secession from Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967.⁸

Enwonwu remained in Onitsha for a period of time after the outbreak of war on 6 July 1967. However, Onitsha came under heavy bombardment from Nigerian forces in October 1967, and Enwonwu fled the town before it was retaken by Nigeria in March 1968.⁹ He then travelled to London and was based there for much of the remainder of the conflict.¹⁰ Enwonwu's decision to leave Biafra was arguably bound up with his broader attitude towards the secessionist effort. Enwonwu openly expressed his opposition to Biafra's breakaway in an interview with the British media,¹¹ an action that Ogbechie argues led to him being branded a traitor of the Igbo people in some quarters.¹²

This historical overview suggests that the war was challenging for Enwonwu in multiple senses, laying bare tensions between the cultural, national and professional aspects of his identity. Indeed, according to Ogbechie, Enwonwu's public opposition to the war and therefore to Biafra's secession not only left him 'isolated from a generation of modern Nigerian artists', but also gestures to the fact that the specificities of his Igbo identity were heavily influenced by his distinctive Onitsha roots.¹³ Ogbechie notes that 'Onitsha is one of nine Igbo towns that claim origins in the Edo kingdom of Benin', and adds that '[a]ll these towns consider themselves distinct from Igbo societies and use the term Igbo to refer to populations of the upland Awka-Orlu area'.¹⁴

It is important to underscore here that differences among Igbo communities did influence people's attitudes to the conflict. For instance, anthropologist S. Elizabeth Bird and historian Fraser M. Ottanelli have offered a detailed exploration of the conflict's impact on a single town, Asaba, which is situated a stone's throw away from Onitsha on the western banks of the Niger river and was the site of one of the conflict's bloodiest episodes.¹⁵ Reflecting on the issue of Western Igbo identity, Bird and Ottanelli note that there was a widespread perception in Asaba during the early days of the war that 'neither [the Biafran nor the Nigerian] side accepted them'.¹⁶ Although Ogbechie does not go so far as to draw a clear causal link between Enwonwu's Onitshan background and his lack of enthusiasm for the Biafran cause, he does assert that because 'the two contending factions called the loyalty of Western Igbo communities into question', those communities 'suffered immense casualties as a result'.¹⁷

Having illustrated some of the socio-historical forces that affected Enwonwu's attitude towards the Biafran crisis, I now want to suggest that these fissures are reflected in his imaginative engagement with this period. In terms of his painted Biafrascapes, the complexity of his relationship with the secession and ensuing conflict are borne out in the range of genres he employed as a response. I propose that these Biafrscape works can be loosely grouped into three categories: landscapes, portraits and paintings featuring mythopoetic forms, all of which are illustrated and discussed in what follows. The first group, consisting of landscape paintings produced from the mid-1960s to the 1980s that include *Ututu: Morning Meeting of Chiefs at Old Asaba* c.1970 (private collection) and *Storm Over Biafra* 1972 (National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), suggests the physical as well as the psychological impact of the conflict on Enwonwu's home region. The second group of paintings, the portraits, encompasses a variety of subjects. These include the *Children of Biafra* series, which responds in part to the refugee crisis that developed before and during the war. The third category, the mythopoetic, is defined by Ogbechie as the 'poetic art of myth

creation' and reflects Enwonwu's career-long interest in Igbo cosmology and spirituality.¹⁸ In terms of his Biafrascapes, the primary work of this type is *Crucified Gods Galore* 1967–8 (private collection), which features a churning mass of masked dancing figures that have vital cultural significance in Igbo societies. Although the range of genres detailed here are indicative of Enwonwu's diverse output throughout his career, I contend that his Biafrascapes are unified by their concern for interrogating some of the thorniest issues thrown up by the crisis. These include questions about the reconcilability of national and ethnic identities, the media's presentation of suffering, and the possibility of spiritual renewal in the face of socio-cultural devastation.

THEORISING (BIAFRA)SCAPES

Before commencing a detailed analysis of these Biafrascapes, it is necessary to draw attention to some of the current scholarship on this period of Enwonwu's artistic career, and to frame my methodological approach. In his study Ogbechie suggests that the artist felt that he had failed to use his influence as Nigeria's foremost modernist to help bring the war to a close. He goes on to suggest that 'Enwonwu's art was at a crossroads' because the 'grim reality of conflict was a direct repudiation of ... his idealist vision of an independent Africa', which 'robbed him of the claim that his art represented a collective African experience'.¹⁹ This quotation invokes Enwonwu's pan-Africanist aspirations, and gestures to his enduring sympathy for Négritude – the aesthetic and philosophical movement developed in 1930s Paris by a group of black intellectuals and creatives, who proclaimed 'the singularity and greatness of the black race'.²⁰ Ogbechie regards Enwonwu's reaction to this period of crisis as primarily concerned with reappraising his position as a cultural representative of Nigeria, and of Africa more broadly. Indeed, Ogbechie adds in relation to the *Children of Biafra* portraits that Enwonwu 'spoke of these artworks as a sort of sacrifice in atonement for fleeing the conflict and for failing to politically intervene effectively during his war-imposed exile in Britain'.²¹ While Ogbechie's argument is persuasive, I suggest that Enwonwu's Biafrascapes do more than simply express his existential angst or regret at this time. His use of various different genres – from ethical portraits of Biafran children to visceral paintings of destroyed landscapes – show him engaging with multiple aspects of the crisis and its aftermath.

In order to demonstrate the significance of Enwonwu's creative responses to the Biafran crisis within his wider career, it is crucial to theorise the way that experiences of political persecution, forced displacement and transnational exile impacted his and others' experiences of the war. To achieve this we can turn to Arjun Appadurai's notion of 'scapes', which he uses to map out the dissonances and inequalities in the global

economy and socio-political system.²² Appadurai proposes that there are five main scapes: 'ethnoscapes' – the numerous landscapes of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live; 'mediascapes' – the images and narratives circulated around the globe by electronic media; the 'ideoscape' – overtly political images bound up with the ideologies and counter-ideologies of states; and 'technoscapes' and 'financescapes' – the movement of technologies and capital around the world.²³ Although Appadurai's model was not designed explicitly for use in art historical analysis, some of these overlapping scapes offer a useful way of tracing and unpicking the entanglement of forces affecting Enwonwu and his creativity during the Biafran crisis.

Appadurai's own analysis of the suffix '-scape' helps illustrate the relevance of his model to this discussion of Enwonwu's work. He notes:

These terms with the common suffix -scape also indicate that these are not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states ... as well as sub-national groupings and movements ... Indeed, the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations ... These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what ... I would like to call 'imagined worlds', that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe.²⁴

By conceptualising scapes as 'deeply perspectival constructs', Appadurai emphasises the potency of the imagination as a political as well as a cultural force within the 'disjunctive' world system.²⁵ As he further asserts, '[t]he imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.'²⁶ This striking formulation suggests that artworks express and encompass a kind of imaginative socio-cultural scape, one that contributes to processes of historically situated world-building enacted by peoples around the globe.²⁷ Returning to Enwonwu's Biafrascapes, the theory of scapes therefore encourages us to relate his temporally specific works to broader socio-political and transnational concerns. Literary critic and cultural historian Stephanie Newell takes such a critical stance in her 2006 book *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*, asserting that '[w]hat the idea of "-scapes" makes possible is an understanding of West Africa that is characterized by physical and cultural *mobility* above all'.²⁸ I will demonstrate that Enwonwu's Biafrascapes index the multiple forms of movement and transformation engendered by the conflict, from the mass displacement of peoples within and outside of the Biafran enclave to the political as well as imaginative

fragmentation of the Nigerian state. As such, I suggest that this body of work by Enwonwu represents a vital prism through which the postcolonial development of West African arts can be appraised.

Appadurai's mapping of contemporary global fragmentation and deterritorialisation is particularly relevant to this study because of the complex nature of the Nigeria-Biafra war in terms of its causes, consequences and wider geopolitical significance. On one level, the forcible secession of a nascent state entity from the larger Nigerian fold clearly bolsters Appadurai's assertion that in contemporary times, 'state and nation are at each other's throats, and the hyphen that links them is less an icon of conjuncture than an index of disjuncture'.²⁹ As the journalist John de St Jorre put it in his own detailed account of the war, written in 1972, the conflict led to 'the rise of two new, virulent and diametrically opposed nationalisms',³⁰ although he added that '[n]either side began the war nor finished it as a true nation-state'.³¹ While St Jorre's conception of Nigeria and Biafra as emerging national and conceptual entities is a direct product of the times, his perspective resonates strongly with more recent claims about the war's significance. For instance, the Nigerian author Helon Habila offered a striking summation of the continuing legacies of the conflict in a 2008 interview:³²

The Nigerian civil war in particular has become a sort of metaphor for the situation we happen to find ourselves in, it seems a war is raging in our midst over the question of whether we are strong enough to put aside the legacy of hatred and sectionalism and divide and rule and narrow ethnicism and opportunism and elitism left to us by the colonialists and embrace what we have in common and move on.³³

Here Habila constructs the Nigeria-Biafra war as a powerful symbol of the fissures that have threatened to rip apart the Nigerian state since its creation during the colonial period. Indeed, he makes a point of connecting the specific developments around the Biafran crisis to their historical causes and afterlives, drawing a long line from the divide and rule policy carried out by the colonialists to the identity politics and prejudices that were a crucial catalyst for Biafra's secession, and which still afflict the Nigerian polity today.

Although Okeke-Agulu chooses to end his study of postcolonial modernism at the moment when the Biafran crisis begins to erupt over the Nigerian polity, I contend that a study of Enwonwu's art from this period is necessary in order to construct a broader historical framework for understanding such critical developments in the region.³⁴ Building on the above historiographical and theoretical foundations, the remainder of this article will focus on three of Enwonwu's Biafrascapes – the landscape painting *Storm*

Over Biafra, the portrait *Chiekwe and Caro* 1971 (private collection) and the mythopoetic work *Crucified Gods Galore* – which are examples of the three genres that the artist employed in responding to the crisis. In doing so, it will present a more nuanced account of the wider cultural ramifications of the Nigeria-Biafra war as well as of Enwonwu's own creative practice.

FROM LANDSCAPES TO IDEOSCAPES: INTERROGATING THE NATION IN *STORM OVER BIAFRA*

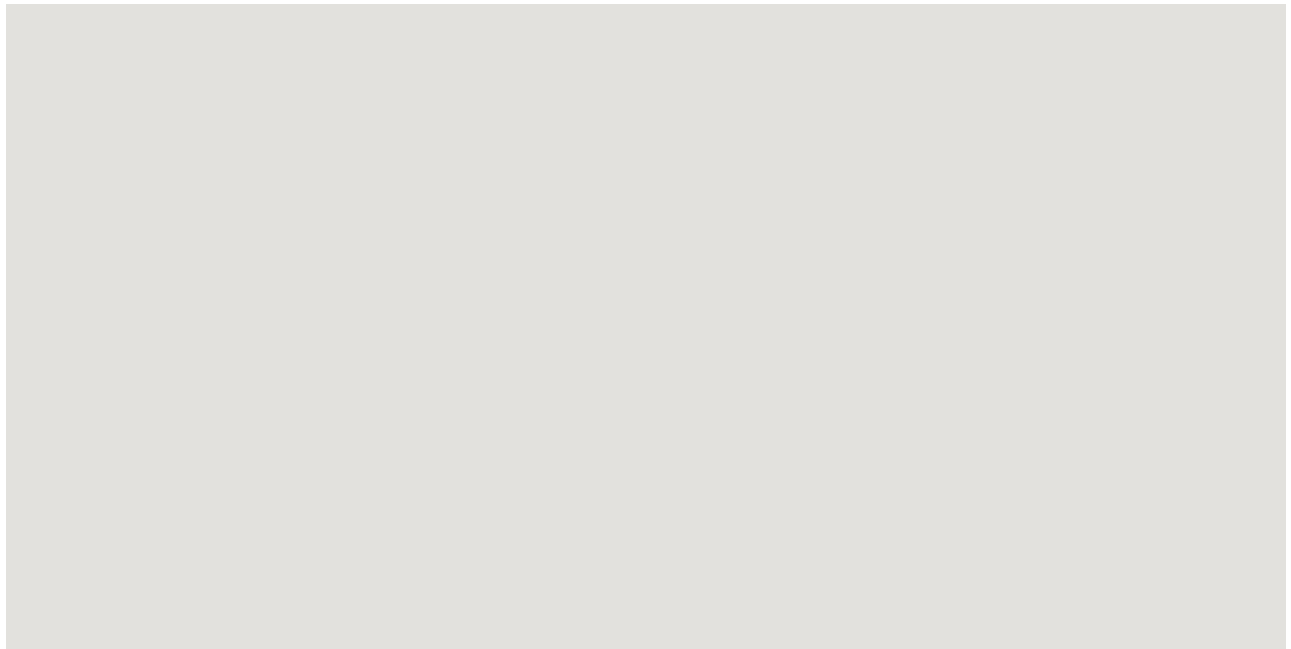


Fig.1

Ben Enwonwu

Storm Over Biafra 1972

National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

© Courtesy the Ben Enwonwu Foundation

In an essay published in 1956 entitled 'Problems of the African Artist Today', Enwonwu explored the negative effects of political oppression on an artist's creative sensibility.³⁵ He wrote: 'I know that when a country [is] suppressed by another politically, the native traditions of the art of the suppressed [sic] begin to die out ... Art, under this situation is doomed; what follows is an artistic vacuum [sic]'.³⁶ Although written more than a decade before the outbreak of the Biafran conflict, the artist here articulates a concern about the potential damage of such a crisis – one that he would arguably go on to express in his post-war landscape *Storm Over Biafra* (fig.1). In this stormy composition Enwonwu

employs bold, slashing brushstrokes in the lower section, forming an entangled mass of viscera and foliage that is held in visual tension with the clouds hanging in the upper section. Rendered through a combination of blues, browns, yellows, pinks and oranges, these clouds appear to erupt above and illuminate the scene.

On one level, the lacerating brushstrokes that cover the painting can be read as conveying the devastation brought to bear on the secessionist state. Such an appraisal is broadly supported by a catalogue entry published by the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., where the painting is held.³⁷ It notes that '[c]attle bones, tall grasses and birds populate the foreground of the seeringly [sic] realistic scene', and suggests that these 'refer to the widespread death and destruction that occurred during Biafra's war of secession from Nigeria'.³⁸ While this description rightly draws attention to the 'dark mood' of the work – and its stormy subject clearly functions as a metaphor for the conflict's damaging effects – less convincing is its claim that the painting represents a 'seeringly realistic' response to the Biafran war. Although, as Ogbechie reveals, Enwonwu did create a number of landscape paintings depicting the Niger river after his return to Nigeria in the aftermath of Biafra's capitulation, I contend that there is a distinctly *unrealistic* dimension to *Storm Over Biafra* that gestures to a much more complex negotiation of the post-war situation.³⁹ Indeed, despite its grave subject, the painting is not simply dark or macabre; it is also striking because it features a kaleidoscope of different colours in an array of shades and intensities. As will be shown, the disorienting composition of *Storm Over Biafra* works to interrogate some of the fundamental, even existential challenges that the Biafran nationalist project and ensuing political crisis posed to the Nigerian state.

Enwonwu himself gestured to these complex dynamics in his speech at a symposium on 'Culture and National Liberation' at the First Pan-African Cultural Festival, held in Algiers in 1969. This was published as 'The Battle for Cultural Freedom' in 1970,⁴⁰ and in it Enwonwu noted that 'African Culture must seek and find authority with which to free Africa from foreign domination as well as to aid the liberation movements in their struggle for African freedom'.⁴¹ Although Biafra is not mentioned in this short piece, the fact that it was originally written at the climax of the conflict suggests that Enwonwu was making a veiled reference to contemporary developments. Moreover, the support the text shows for African liberation movements perhaps indicates a shift in Enwonwu's feelings towards Biafra.

This possible allusion notwithstanding, the lack of a direct reference to the secessionist state or to Nigeria in the essay also speaks volumes about Enwonwu's strained attitude towards the Biafran crisis – an attitude which *Storm Over Biafra's* gloomy subject and

tangled brushstrokes also intimate. In this way, the painting also resonates with writer Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's argument that a veil of silence has defined the war's cultural legacy in Nigeria. She asserts that '[t]he Biafra story is the incomplete story of the Nigerian nation and the suspension of resolution'.⁴² While Bakare-Yusuf's formulation does reflect the debates that have surrounded the conflict since the late 1960s, *Storm Over Biafra* is significant precisely because it visually renders the conflict in such terms – as a tempestuous phenomenon that has left a trail of destruction in its wake. Indeed, although the title identifies the landscape as Biafran, the fact that the painting was produced in the years following Biafra's defeat shows that it gestures beyond that particular time and space. By choosing to represent Biafra in such terms even after peace had been restored, Enwonwu suggests in this painting that the political and cultural storm invoked by the conflict will continue to impact Nigeria's future.

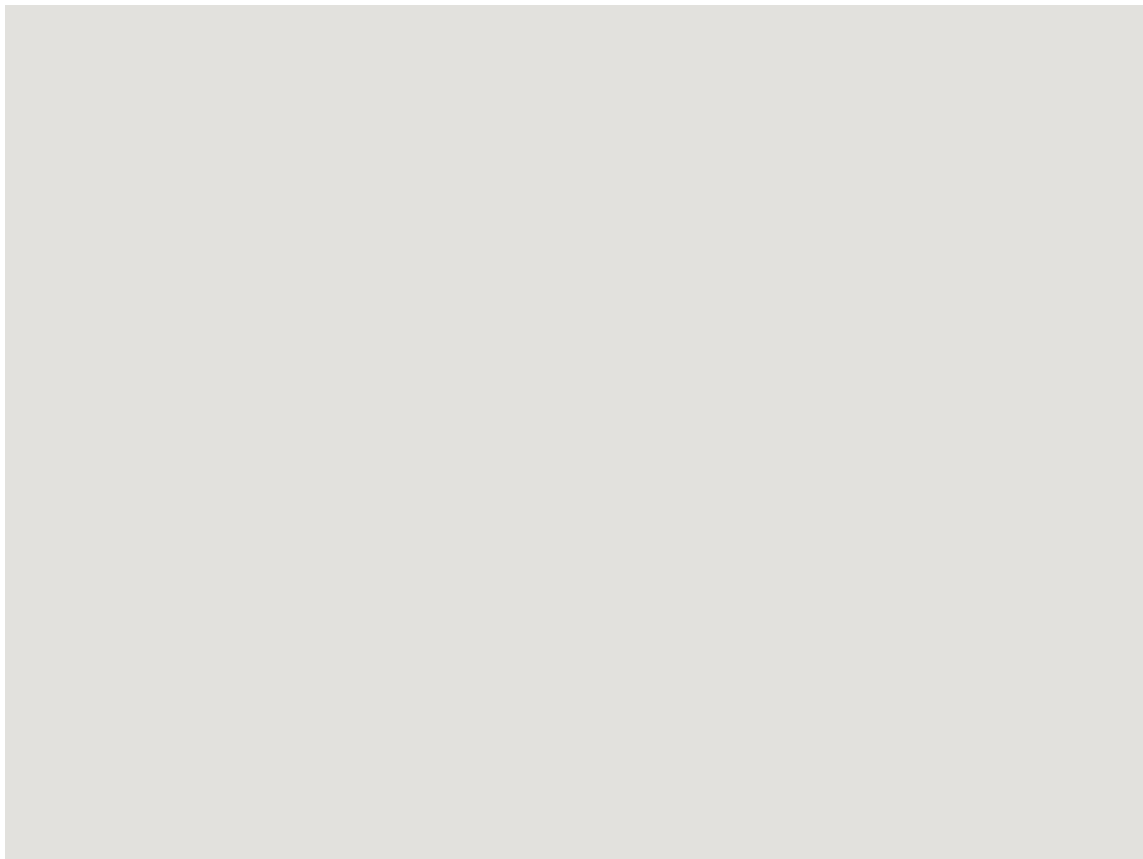


Fig.2
Ben Enwonwu
Ututu: Morning Meeting of Chiefs at Old Asaba c.1970
Private collection
© Courtesy the Ben Enwonwu Foundation

Enwonwu offers a more veiled engagement with the tense post-war situation in the landscape painting *Ututu: Morning Meeting of Chiefs at Old Asaba* c.1970 (fig.2). The work depicts a village scene in which seven elders stand together in conversation while women and children carry goods and play around them. Although the conflict is not referred to explicitly, Ogbachie suggests that this work 'can be interpreted as Enwonwu's commentary on the need for deliberation in the contentious politics of post-war Nigeria'.⁴³ The fact that the war is not directly illustrated in Biafrascapes such as this one reinforces my argument that Enwonwu probes the social residues of the conflict in these works in subtle as well as explicit ways.

Returning to *Storm Over Biafra*, the work can also be read as responding creatively and critically to various political narratives that developed around Biafra, notably those relating to the global reception of the humanitarian crisis and the Nigerian state's attempts to suppress debate about Biafra in the aftermath of the crisis. This process, I suggest, responds to the mediascapes and ideoscapes that Appadurai theorises in his model. These scapes represent a 'concatenation of ideas, terms and images' that circulate globally, the main difference between them being the 'directly political' nature of ideoscapes, which tend to be 'explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it'.⁴⁴ Historian Lasse Heerten has explored one of the major media/ideoscapes that developed during the Nigeria-Biafra conflict, asserting that '[w]ithin a few weeks [in 1968], the Nigerian Civil War was turned into a humanitarian crisis on the newspaper pages and TV screens of contemporaries almost around the globe'.⁴⁵ The significance for Enwonwu's art of media images showing malnourished Biafran children is discussed in the next section, but it is crucial at this stage to underscore the influence of this mediascape in the international reception of the conflict.

In terms of the ideoscapes that grew out of the war, the Nigerian state's post-war policy of reconciliation is important to mention. Immediately after Biafra's surrender on 15 January 1970, a victory message recorded by Nigeria's military ruler General Yakubu Gowon was broadcast across the newly reunified territory. The address proclaimed: 'The so-called "Rising Sun of Biafra" is set for ever. It will be a great disservice for anyone to continue to use the word Biafra to refer to any part of the East Central State of Nigeria ... We are the dawn of national reconciliation. Once again, we have an opportunity to build a new nation.'⁴⁶ This narrative of reconciliation, which was propagated by the federal government in an attempt to quell separatist yearnings, is arguably subverted by Enwonwu in *Storm Over Biafra*. The tangle of harsh lines and swathes of colour that cover the canvas suggest Enwonwu rejects that idea that a clear account or defining image of post-war reunification can ever be expressed. The complexity of the composition can

also be seen to visually register the morass of agendas driving the politics of the day. As St Jorre notes in his history of the war – which was published in the same year that *Storm Over Biafra* was painted – a ‘choking fog of myth and propaganda ... obscured the conflict’.⁴⁷ The tangled lines and expanses of mutating cloud that characterise the work arguably convey this sense of confusion around the war’s causes and effects. Even to this day, divisive debates around whether the Biafran secession was necessary to ensure the safety of Igbo people and whether the Nigerian state committed acts of genocide in Biafra undermine efforts to produce a national consensus regarding the war.⁴⁸

Although this section has focused mainly on the *Storm Over Biafra* landscape, my intention in doing so has not been to suggest that the work is anomalous within Enwonwu’s broader oeuvre. The artist not only produced a variety of landscapes during this period, for example the *Ututu* work mentioned above and the series of representations of the Niger river created around the time of the crisis, but he also went on to paint a number of other stormy landscapes in the decades following the conflict’s close. Notable examples of these include *Storm at Umunede* 1978 and *Stormy Day* 1989 (both in private collections). While these later works do not explicitly invoke the spectre of Biafra, the fact that Enwonwu repeatedly returned to the landscape genre in the decades after the Biafran crisis suggests that works like *Storm Over Biafra* are indicators of the artist’s broader concern with interrogating the thorny issues of nation and identity. In the next section I turn to Enwonwu’s creative exploration of the mediascapes and ethnoscapas that developed around Biafra’s refugee crisis in his *Children of Biafra* portraits, to show how these investigate the capacity of art to represent war-affected peoples and cultures in ethical ways.

ENGAGING ETHNOSCAPES AND MEDIASCAPES: THE *CHILDREN OF BIAFRA* SERIES AND OTHER PORTRAITS

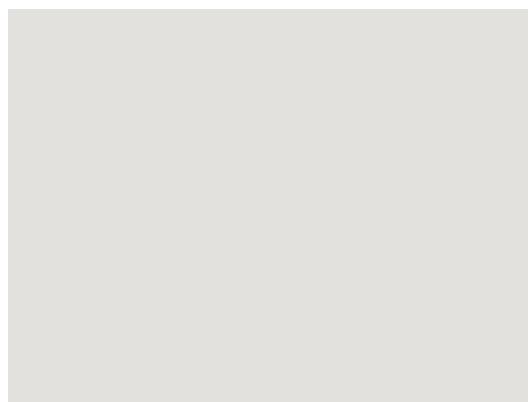


Fig.3

Ben Enwonwu

Chiekwe and Caro 1971

Private collection

© Courtesy the Ben Enwonwu Foundation

As already suggested, the *Children of Biafra* series responds in part to the refugee crisis instituted by the Nigeria-Biafra war. These works, which include the painting *Chiekwe and Caro* (fig.3), portray a number of different children – some in individual portraits and others in group scenes – but in most the figures stand or sit straight on, fixing the gaze of the viewer.⁴⁹ The works are compelling studies of the human consequences of conflict, and they arguably show Enwonwu engaging with what Appadurai describes as ethnoscares: the movements and displacements of people around the world. In this sense, I agree with Ogbechie's argument that these portraits show Enwonwu responding to the anguish endured by refugees in Biafra.⁵⁰ However, I also want to argue that the artist subverts as well as conforms to iconic depictions of suffering so widely circulated in the media at this time by focusing on the ethical impulse that underpins Enwonwu's Biafrascapes.

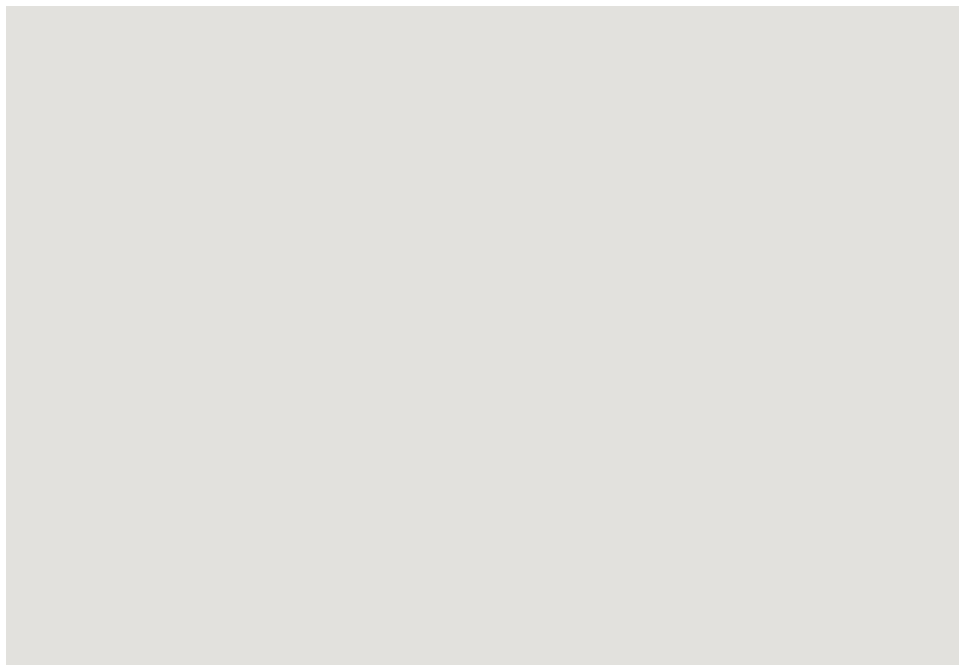




Fig.4
Ben Enwonwu
Three Biafran Children 1966
Private collection
© Courtesy the Ben Enwonwu Foundation

Returning to Heerten's work on the subject, the historian offers a compelling account of the way media and humanitarian organisations used images of Biafran children to elicit public sympathy.⁵¹ He asserts: 'At the core of this event was the icon of the starving "Biafran Babies," skeletal infants deformed by malnourishment and illness ... This humanitarian narrative relied on bodily details to render the pain of others tangible – and on an iconography that aimed at the audience's emotions'.⁵² Although some of Enwonwu's portraits of children can be seen to evoke these images – notably *Three Biafran Children* (fig.4), which art historian and collector Neil Coventry claims 'shows a healthy child on the left, a sick child in the middle and a dying/fading child on the right' – they do not necessarily present the children as abject icons of misery.⁵³ Instead, Enwonwu produces portraits that work to capture in expressive and detailed ways the unique features and humanity of these children. While Enwonwu did profess his disapproval of Biafra's secession, I would argue that these paintings also show him nuancing some of the more reductive media- and ideoscapes that developed during the war by emphasising the ethical dimensions of the conflict. For instance, the central figure

in *Three Biafran Children* is depicted making a supplicatory gesture, but the subtle attention paid to the facial features and the textures of the children's clothing suggest that Enwonwu is concerned with conveying their lived experience rather than offering a propagandist vision of their plight. By portraying three different Biafran children in ways that do not simply reproduce the widely disseminated media imagery of emaciated refugees, these portraits work to evoke the complexity of peoples' experiences of the Biafran crisis. This demonstrates Enwonwu's ethical as well as creative concern with expressing the war's implications in more nuanced terms in his Biafrascapes.

Enwonwu's engagement with ethnoscapas in his portraits also involves a reappraisal of his complicated sense of cultural identity. Ogbechie supplements his reading of the *Children of Biafra* series by asserting that 'it remains an important commentary on the perils of Igbo identity'.⁵⁴ As already noted, the Biafran crisis was in part a violent expression of historical ethnic tensions in Nigeria, and historian Raphael Chijioke Njoku's work on this has clarified the causes of specifically anti-Igbo sentiments.⁵⁵ Njoku notes that '[c]olonialism stirred up the Igbo to a new form of consciousness that appealed to a shared history', adding that this policy formed part of an 'exclusionary politics under colonial rule [that] engendered a conflictual pattern of ethnic structures' and contributed to the Biafran crisis.⁵⁶ Looking beyond 1970, Njoku argues that despite efforts to reintegrate Igbo people after the end of the war, 'the overall effort ... has been undermined by the climate of suspicion and fear of a potential rise of Igbo political power'.⁵⁷

Enwonwu's portraits subtly register these complex historical dynamics by signalling the ethnicity, as well as the precarity, of the children depicted in his *Children of Biafra* series. He uses Igbo names in the titles of some of the works, for example in *Chiekwe and Caro*, and he refers to Igbo cosmology in his painting *Ogbanje: The Ghosts of Tradition* 1967 (private collection). Writer Chinwe Achebe offers a detailed account of the significance of ogbanje figures, noting that "'ogbanje" are ... part human and part spirit beings whose lives are confounded by the added loyalty which they owe to spirit deities ... The most notable of these demands is that the "ogbanje" will not be allowed to enjoy a full life cycle'.⁵⁸ Given the liminal status of the ogbanje, who traverse the worlds of the living and the dead, it is reasonable to deduce that Enwonwu's decision to allude to this dimension of Igbo ontology reflects a desire to inscribe his *Children of Biafra* portraits with a ghostliness that reinforces their precarious state as refugees of war.

Notwithstanding the clear signification of Igbo cultural traditions in the portraits' titles, the fact that Enwonwu chose to offer detailed renderings of the children's faces and figures suggests that he wished to avoid reducing them to symbols of their cultural

identity. Such an approach could have had the effect of devoiding them of their individuality in the service of a particular ethno-political agenda. This interpretation of the portraits' engagement with ethnoscapas also helps us to understand Enwonwu's interrogation of the humanitarian images that circulated during the conflict. As Appadurai asserts in relation to ethnoscapas, 'the central paradox of ethnic politics in today's world is that primordia, (whether of language or skin color or neighbourhood or of kinship) have become globalized', adding that these politically evocative sentiments 'have become spread over vast and irregular spaces'.⁵⁹ Given the way the politics of the war became so widely broadcast during the crisis, Enwonwu's *Children of Biafra* works arguably gesture to the transnational dynamics and ethnoscapas that impacted the war's development.

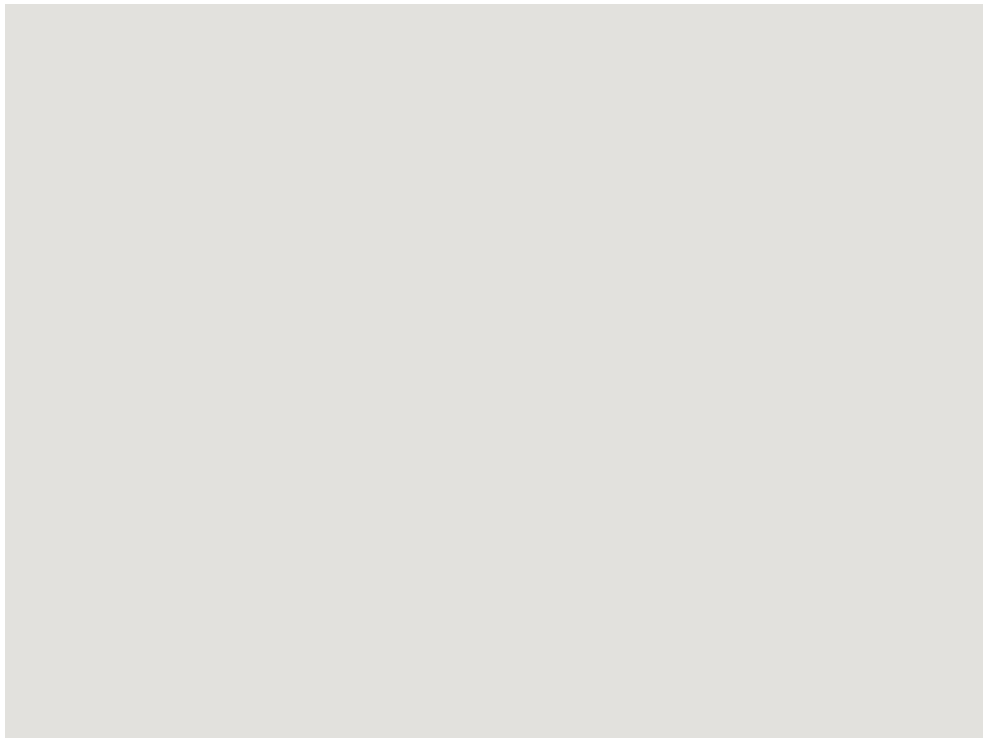


Fig.5

Ben Enwonwu

Tutu 1974

Private collection

© Courtesy the Ben Enwonwu Foundation

Enwonwu was not only producing portraits depicting Igbo people in this period, however. Worthy of mention are the striking paintings *The Driver* 1968 (private collection), which portrays the Yoruba man who worked as Enwonwu's driver at the time, and his famous *Tutu* portraits: three paintings produced between 1973 and 1974 (see *Tutu* 1974; fig.5).⁶⁰ The latter works depict a Yoruba woman of royal Ife lineage, and Ogbechie notes that Enwonwu decided to paint her because he was struck by 'her unusual features'.⁶¹ Although the *Tutu* works are not obviously Biafrascapes given their subject matter, the Nigerian writer Ben Okri argues that the 1974 *Tutu* painting reflects 'something about the times. For after the civil war, the [Nigerian] nation enjoyed, without knowing it, a second, bruised innocence ... It existed between the end of carnage and the resumption of a lost unity.'⁶² Okri draws attention to the dark colours used to depict the sitter in this work, which for him makes 'the depth of her character ... more evident' than the earlier portraits. The writer uses this distinguishing factor to suggest that the later *Tutu* painting is 'the secret image of a nation coming back into the light after a time of darkness'.⁶³

While Okri's supposition that *Tutu* represents an allegory of Nigeria's tense and transitional post-war period in Nigeria is not explicitly evidenced by the painting's content, the writer nevertheless conveys the portrait's potent symbolism for Nigerians. He also notes that reproductions of the work are widely sold in the country, which further underscores its cultural salience.⁶⁴ Such a reading of the painting's iconic status supports my own designation of it as one of Enwonwu's Biafrascapes. Although the *Tutu* portraits do not explicitly engage with the memory of the war, their enduring significance – as Okri argues – is at least partly bound up with their post-war origins. This interpretation is further evidenced by Enwonwu's use of dark but vibrant tones in both the final *Tutu* work and his earlier *Storm Over Biafra* landscape. Enwonwu's decision to paint this sitter in *Tutu* was likely driven by a degree of pragmatism – Ogbechie suggests that the artist may have sought the patronage of Ife royalty because it 'offered him protection from

persecution on account of his Igbo ethnicity'.⁶⁵ However, this motivation works to reinforce the connection between *Tutu* and the aftermath of the Biafran crisis.

While Enwonwu's varied group of Biafra-inflected portraits both represent and interrogate a complex array of socio-cultural and transnational dynamics, more significant is the concern they show for expressing the humanity of the Biafran crisis. In doing so, they reveal the ethical imperative driving Enwonwu's broader imaginative responses to Biafra. This article will now discuss the ways in which Enwonwu draws from the mythopoetic imagery of indigenous deities and masquerades in some of his Biafrascapes to explore the spiritual and cultural implications of the conflict. I assert that these paintings laid the groundwork for the transcendental evocations of dancing masquerade forms that marked the final phase of Enwonwu's creative production.

MYTHOPOETIC TRANSITIONS IN *CRUCIFIED GODS GALORE*: TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY OF SCAPES

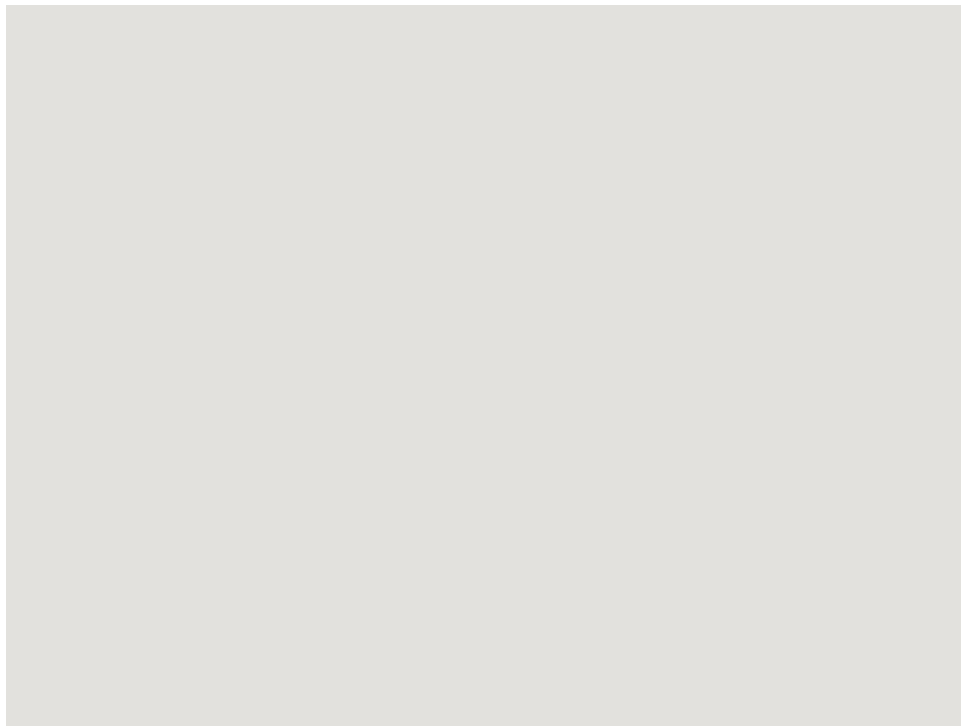


Fig.6

Ben Enwonwu

Crucified Gods Galore 1967–8

Private collection

© Courtesy the Ben Enwonwu Foundation

At first glance, the dark, visceral and shifting mass of dancers and masked figures that make up the composition of *Crucified Gods Galore* 1967–8 (fig.6) evokes a sense of communal fever and violent carnage. Indeed, the collection of bold lines scattered across the canvas is reminiscent of the scarred landscape Enwonwu would later depict in *Storm Over Biafra*. Yet despite this evocative subject matter, there are contradictory accounts of the work's title. Ogbechie, for instance, uses the name *Dance Forms*, rather than *Crucified Gods Galore*.⁶⁶ While the dynamic forms expressed in the painting do resonate with Enwonwu's *African Dances* series produced in the early 1970s,⁶⁷ Coventry suggests that he would 'lean toward the title of *Crucified Gods Galore* in this case', noting that auction houses often apply names like *Tribal Dancers* if the titles of paintings depicting such subjects are not clearly documented.⁶⁸ He adds that the *Crucified Gods Galore* 'title may also come from [Enwonwu's] own reproduction of this work which he is alleged to have painted in the 1980s as a gift from President Ibrahim Babangida to HM The Queen.'⁶⁹

Despite offering a different title for the work, Ogbechie gives a concise appraisal of this and other related paintings produced by Enwonwu during the war. The art historian asserts that in works such as *Crucified Gods Galore*, the artist 'inscrib[es] his anxieties through swirling masses of inchoate figures'.⁷⁰ This analysis gestures to an important aspect of the work: its fervid depiction of spiritual forms arguably reflects Enwonwu's commitment to the Igbo concept of *nka*, which, as the artist himself noted, is an 'invocation of ancestral spirits through giving concrete form or body to them' in activities such as art making.⁷¹ By integrating Ogbechie's interpretation of the 'anxious' subject matter of *Crucified Gods Galore* with Enwonwu's own account of *nka*, it is possible to read the painting as an expression of a spiritual and existential crisis afflicting the artist during the Biafran crisis.

Indeed, the frenzied movements of the tortured gods portrayed in the work could be seen to suggest the destructive consequences of the conflict in metaphysical as well as material terms. This reading is supported by the statement Enwonwu gave to the British

press in 1968, after he had fled the Biafran enclave. He asserted: 'the roar of thunder may no longer inspire an artistic creation, nor perhaps ... can it ever again inspire that magico-religious feeling that had effects on the psychology of our village people'.⁷² However, rather than viewing the painting as evidence of Enwonwu succumbing to this upheaval, I assert that it should instead be read as an articulation of the spiritual as well as the material crisis that the war engendered. Enwonwu's invocation of dancing masked figures in *Crucified Gods Galore* shows him reappraising the mythological and mythopoetic influences that were crucial to his artistic trajectory even in the face of those destructive developments. Ogbechie's definition of mythopoesis as the 'poetic art of myth creation', wherein myth is viewed as having social as well as mystical functions in human cultures, allows us to understand Enwonwu's art as engaging with these overlapping concerns.⁷³

Assessing the significance of masking traditions in Igbo as well as broader African cultures, art historian Herbert M. Cole and artist Chike Aniakor explain that 'all Igbo masks are considered spirits, and thus ... have a certain aura and mystique, particularly in performance'.⁷⁴ Noting that 'many are considered "returning fathers" or "incarnate dead"', Cole and Aniakor further assert that '[t]he ideology of most Igbo masking is rooted in the closeness and interpenetration of these worlds of the dead and the living'.⁷⁵ Considering *Crucified Gods Galore* with this analysis in mind, it becomes clear that the kinetic, frenzied quality of the masked figures evoked in the painting – portrayed through the repeated use of sharp and sweeping brushstrokes – not only inscribes the canvas with a sense of dynamic movement. The presence of the supernatural force of the masquerade means that the work also traverses different realities, carrying a mythopoetic aesthetic that makes it capable of transitioning between the worlds of the living and the dead.

In his own account, Ogbechie asserts that masquerades have a 'mythopoetic capacity' that demonstrates 'the unique functions of numinous experiences in the constitution of indigenous knowledge and cosmologies'.⁷⁶ As noted above, Ogbechie views mythopoesis as an artistic expression of mythic forms that underpin cultural formations.⁷⁷ Yet while the art historian does not perceive the masquerade forms in *Crucified Gods Galore* to be demonstrative of such mythopoetic significance, I would suggest that this Biafrascap does index the fact that in Igbo culture, as Ogbechie states, 'masking traditions provide each generation with the tools they need to make sense of their contemporary existence'.⁷⁸ By using such imagery in the painting, Enwonwu can be seen engaging with the masquerade's socio-political as well as mythical significance. As such, his depiction of tortured masked forms not only conveys the spiritual crisis instigated by the conflict,

but also supports the collective efforts of Igbo people and other groups involved in the conflict in making sense of its wider effects.

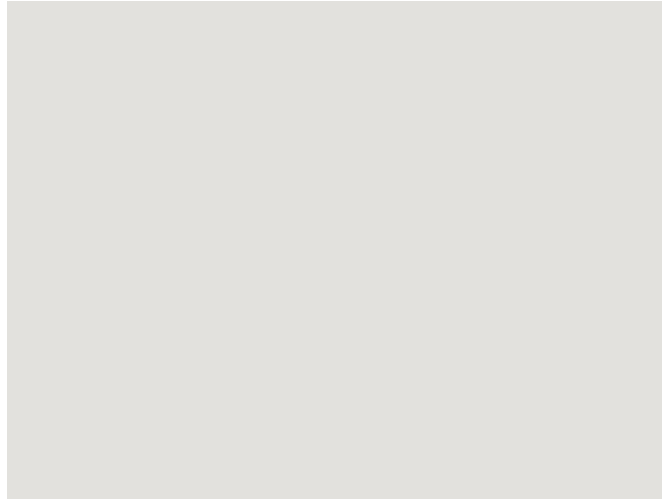


Fig.7

Ben Enwonwu

Agbogo-Mmuo Ogolo 1992

Private collection

© Courtesy the Ben Enwonwu Foundation

Looking beyond Enwonwu's immediate artistic output during and after the war to his later evocations of the masquerade, it is possible to connect *Crucified Gods Galore* to these subsequent developments. Ogbechie notes, for instance, that Enwonwu's 'use of indigenous symbolism' in his post-war art 'served him well as he recast the thorny question of national reconciliation in metaphorical images', while Nkiru Nzegwu emphasises that Enwonwu's life 'took a spiritual turn in the mid-1980s ... [when] his art gradually returned to its formative cultural roots as he memorialized history'.⁷⁹ As part of this evolution, Enwonwu became preoccupied with producing lyrical, atmospheric images of masquerades, such as in his *Ogolo* series (see, for instance, *Agbogo-Mmuo Ogolo* 1992; fig.7). Nzegwu persuasively argues that the forms produced in these works

‘validate a chosen way of grieving through dance, and of memorably resolving the trauma of the life/death cycle’.⁸⁰ While these late works show Enwonwu focusing more on the masquerade as a dynamic way of memorialising history, I maintain that his earlier work during the Nigeria-Biafra war explores these same possibilities. In the *Crucified Gods Galore* Biafrscape, Enwonwu draws from this aesthetic and spiritual tradition as a way of extending his broader endeavours during this crisis period into the realm of the metaphysical.

IMAGINATIVE INTERWEAVING

As a way of bringing this analysis to a close, it is pertinent to quote the final lines of Molar Ogundipe-Leslie’s poem ‘To a “Jane Austen” Class at Ibadan University’, which helps to lend lyrical clarification to my analysis of Enwonwu’s multivalent mediation of the crisis in the Nigerian postcolony.⁸¹ Ogundipe-Leslie writes:

Sew the old days
Sew the old days that we may wear them
to dance through coming storms
our steps detoning.⁸²

Although this poem does not explicitly engage with the war and its legacies, Ogundipe-Leslie nevertheless offers a characterisation of the historical past that is reminiscent of Enwonwu’s artistic responses to Biafra. Rather than rendering the ‘old days’ as fixed socio-cultural shackles from which future generations cannot hope to escape, the poet instead conceptualises memory and history as a collection of different threads sewn together through a process of creative engagement, interrogation and transformation that takes place in the ever-shifting present. This act of imaginative interweaving, so Ogundipe-Leslie suggests, not only revitalises a people’s past and sensitises them to it, but also lends them poise and agility as they move forward to encounter future struggles.

Such nuanced negotiations are, I believe, reflected in the way Enwonwu’s Biafrscapes struggled to weather the storm that the Biafran crisis cast over the Nigerian postcolony. Although Okeke-Agulu contends that it is artists of the generation after Enwonwu’s that ‘in the late 1960s raised the stakes and expanded the meaning of the political in postcolonial modernism’, I argue that Enwonwu’s own contribution to modernist expression during this period is just as innovative.⁸³ Enwonwu’s Biafrscapes may not articulate his politics as clearly as the work of other artists. However, by laying bare the strains and anxieties of this period through his art, he nevertheless offers a profound

commentary on the times. Recalling philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe's definition of the postcolony, which he describes as enclosing 'multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another', so Enwonwu's artistic responses to the Biafran crisis represent a varied body of work woven out of different cultural traditions, aesthetic forms and political perspectives.⁸⁴

Returning once again to Appadurai's theorisation of scapes, his schema resonates with Mbembe's model of postcolonial entanglement when it proposes 'that we begin to think of the configuration of cultural forms in today's world as fundamentally fractal, that is, as possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities'.⁸⁵ Enwonwu's Biafrascapes arguably embody these qualities, refusing to offer a conclusive vision of either the conflict's significance or the artist's personal view of it. Instead, they conjure an ethically expressive imaginary of scapes that navigate the rupture the war threatened to rip through Nigerian modernism. The theoretical approach I have taken here has aimed to demonstrate the necessity of reappraising Enwonwu's and others' artistic responses to the Biafran crisis. By reading such works as traversing a series of overlapping scapes, which span socio-political, transnational, aesthetic and spiritual concerns, a potentially transformative vision of Nigeria's postcolonial modernism begins to emerge.

NOTES

1. Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Durham, North Carolina 2015, p.19.

2. Ibid., pp.259–60.

3. Ibid., pp.1–19. For more on the Zaria Art Society and its impact on Nigerian art history, see Chika Okeke, 'The Quest: From Zaria to Nsukka', in Clementine Deliss (ed.), *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Paris and New York 1995, pp.192–4; and Sharon Pruitt, 'Bruce Onobrakpeya: A Continuation of Cultural Synthesis', in Nkiru Nzegwu (ed.), *Contemporary Textures: Multidimensionality in Nigerian Art*, Binghampton 1999, pp.69–96.

4. Okeke, one of the leading Zaria Rebels, stated in a 1959 lecture that '[w]e must have our own school of art independent of occidental [European] and oriental schools, but drawing, as much as possible, from what we consider in our clear judgment, to be the cream of these influences, and wedding them to our native art culture'. This observation was later published in Okeke's essay 'My Strategy for Creative Development: Asele Institute' [1981], in Uche Okeke, *Art in Development: A Nigerian Perspective*, ed. by LeClair Grier Lambert, Nimo 1982, pp.53–6; p.54.

5. After the war Okeke was invited to teach at the Department of Applied and Fine Arts at Nsukka, which is situated in the east of the country and formed part of the Biafran secessionist territory. He

encouraged his students to explore indigenous artistic forms, particular the Igbo tradition of *uli*. *Uli* is an art practice and idiom traditionally used by Igbo women to decorate bodies and buildings with intricate linear motifs and designs. Okeke, who is also Igbo, started experimenting with the *uli* aesthetic in the late 1950s as part of the natural synthesis movement and this project of Igbo cultural revivalism gained fresh urgency in the aftermath of Biafra's defeat. The revitalisation of the *uli* art practice at Nsukka in the 1970s had a huge impact on the evolution of post-war Nigerian art. Renowned Nsukka-trained artists such as Obiora Udechukwu, Ndidi Dike and Marcia Kure have all used this mode of expression in their work. For an in-depth account of the development of the *uli* artistic practice at Nsukka, see Simon Ottenberg (ed.), *The Nsukka Artists and Nigerian Contemporary Art*, Seattle and London 2002.

6. Okeke-Agulu 2015, p.243.

7. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist*, Rochester, New York 2008, p.171.

8. For more detailed accounts of these events, see G.N. Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood: Prelude to the Nigerian Civil War, 1960–1967*, Trenton 2011, and Michael Gould, *The Biafran War: The Struggle for Modern Nigeria*, London and New York 2013.

9. Ogbechie 2008, p.171. For more information on the siege of Onitsha, see John de St Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War*, London, Sydney, Auckland and Toronto 1972, pp.186–8.

10. Ogbechie 2008, p.171. Although Ogbechie does not specify the date that Enwonwu came to London, an issue of *West Africa* magazine dated 29 June 1968 offers some clarification regarding the artist's whereabouts during this period. In one article, which reports on an exhibition opening held at the Commonwealth Institute in London in the previous week, it is noted that 'Ben Enwonwu, one of the fathers of Nigerian contemporary art ... was at the exhibition's private view'. *West Africa*, no.2665, 29 June 1968, p.747.

11. Excerpts from the interview were published in an issue of *West Africa* dated 5 October 1968. In the article Enwonwu is quoted as saying: 'I would like to see a new Ibo leadership that will draw lasting lessons from this tragic war, and brace itself with skill and courage for a worthier future in a nobler Nigeria'. *West Africa*, no.2679, 5 October 1968, p.1172. Ibo is a variant spelling of Igbo.

12. Ogbechie 2008, p.171. Ogbechie does not specify which members of the Igbo population criticised Enwonwu's actions. However, given the Igbo artist's fame among Nigerians and Biafrans, it is reasonable to assume that the Biafran government would have condemned Enwonwu for denouncing the war effort.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p.25.

15. S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Asaba Massacre: Trauma, Memory, and the Nigerian Civil War*, Cambridge 2017. Asaba became caught up in the fighting in October 1967 after the Biafran army retreated from the area in anticipation of an assault by Nigerian forces. Once those forces had entered the area, reports started to emerge of looting and violence being committed against locals.

Bird and Ottanelli estimate that over the course of a week 'it is likely that more than 1,000 people were killed'; pp.31–54.

16. Ibid., p.26.

17. Ogbecchie 2008, p.178.

18. Ibid., p.17.

19. Ibid., p.167.

20. Okeke-Agulu 2015, p.95.

21. Ogbecchie 2008, p.176.

22. Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Public Culture*, vol.2, no.2, 1990, pp.1–24.

23. Ibid., pp.6–7.

24. Ibid., p.7.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p.5.

27. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983.

28. Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*, Oxford 2006, p.12. Emphasis in the original.

29. Appadurai 1990, p.14.

30. St Jorre 1972, p.370.

31. Ibid.

32. Helon Habila, 'Some Things Just Cannot Wait: Helon Habila Discusses *Measuring Time* with Ike Anya', *Nigeriaworld*, 30 January 2008, <https://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication/anya/013008.html>, accessed 27 May 2018.

33. Ibid., accessed 27 May 2018.

34. Okeke-Agulu 2015, pp.259–89.

35. Ben Enwonwu, 'Problems of the African Artist Today', *Présence Africaine*, nos.8–10, Autumn 1956, pp.174–8.

36. Ibid., p.176.

37. The National Museum of African Art forms part of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

38. 'Storm Over Biafra', catalogue entry, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., undated, <https://africa.si.edu/collections/start?t:state:flow=bb411d13-2710-4994-...>, accessed 29 May 2018.

39. As Ogbechie notes in his doctoral thesis, on returning to Lagos after visiting his desolated hometown Enwonwu 'began a series of landscape paintings of the River Niger at Onitsha in which he documented the broad river devoid of its bridge that had been blown up during the war'. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, 'Ben Enwonwu and the Constitution of Modern Art in 20th Century Nigeria', unpublished PhD thesis, Northwestern University 2000, vol.1, p.461. One of these paintings is *River Niger Landscape* 1970–1 (private collection).
40. Ben Enwonwu, 'The Battle for Cultural Freedom', *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, nos.7–8, Summer 1970, pp.90–2.
41. Ibid., p.92.
42. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, 'Scattered Limbs, Scattered Stories: The Silence of Biafra', *African Identities*, vol.10, no.3, Summer 2012, p.247.
43. Ogbechie 2008, p.178.
44. Appadurai 1990, p.9.
45. Lasse Heerten, *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering*, Cambridge 2017, p.2.
46. General Gowon, 'The Dawn of National Reconciliation', radio broadcast, Lagos, 15 January 1970, reproduced on the website of the American Historical Association, <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-...>, accessed 1 November 2018.
47. St Jorre 1972, p.17.
48. For a detailed analysis of the questions that continue to surround the war, see Gould 2013.
49. The Ben Enwonwu Foundation website gives the title of this painting as *Chiekwe-Caro*; see <https://benenwonwufoundation.org/works/>, accessed 5 June 2018.
50. Ogbechie 2008, p.176.
51. Lasse Heerten, '"A" as in Auschwitz, "B" as in Biafra', in Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno (eds.), *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, Cambridge 2014, pp.249–74.
52. Ibid., p.256.
53. Neil Coventry, email correspondence with the author, 10 October 2017. Coventry has kindly given me permission to quote from this correspondence.
54. Ogbechie 2008, p.178.
55. Raphael Chijioke Njoku, 'The Making of Igbo Ethnicity in the Nigerian Setting: Colonialism, Identity, and the Politics of Difference', in Toyin Falola and Raphael Chijioke Njoku (eds.), *Igbo in the Atlantic World: African Origins and Diasporic Destinations*, Bloomington 2016, pp.265–84.
56. Ibid., pp.267 and 265.
57. Ibid., p.279.
58. Chinwe Achebe, *The World of the Ogbanje*, Enugu 1986, p.26.

59. Appadurai 1990, p.15.

60. Ben Okri, 'Lost African Masterpiece Rediscovered After Nearly 50 Years', *Financial Times*, 8 February 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/b2de8862-0c2e-11e8-bacb-2958fde95e5e>, accessed 3 March 2018. In the article, Okri introduces the *Tutu* portraits in the wake of the 1974 work's rediscovery in December 2017. Before this point, all three paintings had been assumed lost.

61. Ogbecchie 2008, p.182.

62. Okri 2018, accessed 3 March 2018.

63. Ibid., accessed 3 March 2018.

64. Ibid., accessed 3 March 2018.

65. Ogbecchie 2008, p.261.

66. Ibid., p.173.

67. Ibid., p.182. Paintings in this series include *Dancing Figures* 1972 (Ben Enwonwu Foundation, Lagos) and *Africa Dance* 1973 (National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos).

68. Neil Coventry, email correspondence with the author, 10 October 2017.

69. Ibid.

70. Ogbecchie 2008, p.176.

71. Ben Enwonwu quoted in Nkiru Nzegwu, 'Representational Axis: A Cultural Realignment of Enwonwu', in Nzegwu 1999, p.168.

72. Enwonwu quoted in *West Africa*, no.2679, 1968, p.1172.

73. Ogbecchie 2008, pp.17 and 217.

74. Herbert M. Cole and Chike Aniakor, *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos*, Los Angeles 1984, p.113.

75. Ibid.

76. Ogbecchie 2008, p.204.

77. This theorisation draws from the work of the mythologist Joseph Campbell, who argues that mythology functions at four levels of human culture: the 'mystical', 'cosmological', 'sociological' and 'psychological'. Campbell further asserts that myth's psychological function underpins all the others by 'shaping individuals to the aims and ideals of their various groups'. (Campbell quoted in Ogbecchie 2008, p.204.) Ogbecchie therefore foregrounds the multiple significance of mythology, which represents both 'a narrative of cultural beliefs and a platform for the production of cultural identities'. (Ogbecchie 2008, p.204.)

78. Ibid., p.225.

79. Ibid., p.178; and Nzegwu 1999, pp.139–85; p.177.

80. Nzegwu 1999, p.180.

81. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, *Sew the Old Days and Other Poems*, Ibadan 1985, p.3.

82. Ibid.

83. Okeke-Agulu 2015, p.286.

84. Achille J. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Oakland 2001, p.14.

85. Appadurai 1990, p.20.

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